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Donald Hankey put the motives of the soldier, which must also be the motives of the citizens who are to carry on the work of the soldiers, as follows:

If we fought from blood-lust or hate, war would be sordid. But if we fight as only a Christian may, that friendship and peace with our foes may become possible, then fighting is our duty, and our fasting and dirt, our wounds and our death, are our beauty and God's glory.¹

Now if the preacher can win his own standing-ground in the midst of the current confusion in some such noble way as this he will have the right spirit in which to give his message to his community. And the temper in which he addresses himself to his work is the primary concern in these days. Unless he is thinking clearly and unless his own heart is right he will have no message and the community will look to him in vain for leadership.

THE PREMILLENNIAL MENACE

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To divide Christians by appeal to theological differences in these days savors of disloyalty. We need unity of religious spirit if our national morale is to be strong and hopeful. But the present crusade of premillenarians is not a matter of mere theology. It strikes at the heart of our religion if not of our patriotism. For this reason we discuss it. An assault upon our faith in a God who works through human ideals and national sacrifice for the sake of a better world is too dangerous to be permitted without protest and exposure. Professor Case writes with the facts before him, without bitterness but with warning. Since his paper has been put in type the newspapers report that several of the leaders of one of these movements have been found guilty of disloyal utterances and sentenced to imprisonment.

The American nation is engaged in a gigantic effort to make the world safe for democracy. While pledged to give unreservedly of its blood and treasure for the attainment of this ideal, there are those in our midst who declare that the undertaking is foredoomed to failure. The writer has before him a recent letter

containing these oracular words: "If it were not pathetic it would be silly to think that democracy, if it prevails, will cause wars to cease. The men who believe this are simply chasing a phantom that will always elude them. There is no solution except the coming of Christ as he foretold."

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 241.

The Present Crisis

The teaching which inspired the foregoing quotation is being widely advocated at the present time. In the name of religion we are told that the world cannot be appreciably improved by human effort. A few temporary reforms may be effected here and there, but on the whole the situation must grow constantly worse until God intervenes to destroy the present world and establish a new order of society by catastrophic means. This transformation can be brought about only by the second coming of Christ, whose return is momentarily expected. According to this teaching, commonly known as premillenarianism, it has been divinely decreed that wars shall prevail and other evils multiply rapidly upon the earth as the moment for Christ's return draws near. The present world-conflict, with its exhibition of horrors unparalleled in the history of warfare, is hailed as clear evidence of the nearness of the end.

Under ordinary circumstances one might excusably pass over premillenarianism as a wild and relatively harmless fancy. But in the present time of testing it would be almost traitorous negligence to ignore the detrimental character of the premillennial propaganda. By proclaiming that wars cannot be eliminated until Christ returns and that in the meantime the world must grow constantly worse, this type of teaching strikes at the very root of our present national endeavor to bring about a new day for humanity, when this old earth shall be made a better place in which to live, and a new democracy of nations shall arise to render wars

impossible. While this struggle is demanding every ounce of the nation's energy, premillenarians are advocating a type of teaching which is fundamentally antagonistic to our present national ideal. Who is going to devote himself with zest to a cause of which he is convinced beforehand that it runs counter to the divine decrees and is doomed to failure before it is begun? At the present moment premillenarianism is a serious menace to our democracy and is all the more dangerous because it masquerades under the cloak of piety.

Premillennial Pessimism

Representative premillenarians shall speak for themselves on this subject. They regard social and political reforms as quite incapable of bringing any substantial relief to humanity. No institution of present society, not even the church itself, can effect permanent improvement or direct the procession of human history upward in its course. The present world must grow worse, and they are called misguided church leaders who think and preach that "civic righteousness as seen in clamoring for sanitary tenements, voting out the saloon, purifying the theater and politics, eliminating segregated vice, will regenerate a city."

An oft-quoted premillennial authority protests against those people who "think they see signs of promise in movements of reform. They think to give the church a better shape, and the state a better government, and the world a freer Bible, and that thus the millennium will come. I have no confidence in any such hopes. I see more of promise in the darkest features of the

times than in all these pious and patriotic dreams." More and more is the Christian state coming to be a "tool of Satan," in the opinion of another representative of this school.

In Blackstone's *Jesus Is Coming*, a book that may almost be called the Bible of premillennialism, we read:

Surely then this wicked world, which is so radically opposed to God and under the present control of his arch enemy, is not growing better. On the contrary, judgment, fire, and perdition are before it. . . . The mystery of iniquity which already worked in the days of the apostles shall culminate in the man of sin, the personal antichrist whom even the mass of the Jews will receive and who will be so great and rule with such universal authority that he is to be destroyed only by the personal appearing of the Lord himself. There is no hope then for the world but in the coming of Christ the King.

In an impassioned outburst of desperation at the horrors of the present war a more recent prophet of the premillennial gospel offers a suffering world the same counsel of despair. He sees no help for the situation except through the second coming of Christ: "I am hoping and intensely praying for the return of the Lord in my day and generation to put an end to this suicide of nations . . . and bring in the kingdom of the everlasting peace."

Although premillennarians parade their views under the aegis of Christianity, they uniformly deny the adequacy of the Christian gospel's power to permeate the masses of society and elevate humanity to a higher plane of living. They emphatically affirm, not only that the world is growing no better, but that the church itself is losing its spiritual

power and is destined for the same wrack and ruin that await every other social institution. Romanism, we are told, is already Satan's peculiar possession, and Protestantism is rapidly sinking to the same level of alleged iniquity. Blackstone is confident that no one can fail to see the corrupting influences of the leaven at present permeating even the "evangelical denominations"; and one of the speakers at the "prophetic conference" of 1914 declared with evident relish that "today we witness the apostasy of gentile Christendom."

Still more recently another ardent protagonist of premillennarianism says:

It is quite true that those who accept the Bible as a divine revelation [apparently only premillennialists belong to this favored class] do not look for the transformation of nations and industrial classes through the operation of the moral ideals of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . The two great outstanding conditions in the days before the flood were "corruption" and "violence," and no two words could be chosen that would more aptly express the existing and rapidly maturing conditions of the present time. . . . So we may be increasingly confident that the time is near when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven.

Thus the premillennialist throws up the sponge. He raises the white flag of surrender, confessing himself hopelessly incapable of successfully combating the evils of the present world. He passively awaits divine intervention, in the meantime consoling himself with such oft-repeated phrases as, "Surely it could not be worse. This is the most awful destruction the world has ever seen and it surely must be the coming end of the age." "World-conditions

point clearly, unmistakably, and positively to the end of our age. Prophecies relating to that end may soon begin to be fulfilled."

Practical Consequences

The inevitable effect of such teaching upon those who come under its influence, particularly at the present time, is easily imagined. Even under ordinary circumstances this pessimistic outcry against our present social order is sufficiently harmful in its deadening effect upon the individual's civic conscience. If the world cannot be improved, but is destined to grow constantly worse—and the more rapid the deterioration the better, since Christ's coming will thereby be hastened—why should one bother about the futile work of social betterment or attempt to establish more ideal forms of government? At best the game is hardly worth the candle, for any temporary success is a backward step delaying by so much the advent of the new kingdom to be ushered in with the catastrophic end of the world.

Consistent premillenarianism presents peculiar dangers at the present moment. According to its interpretation of national duty, what does it matter whether America is victorious or defeated in the present war? A victory can have no permanently beneficial results. If the end of all things does not come within a short time, then the world must be afflicted with still more terrible calamities in the near future, regardless of who may be the victors in the present struggle. To grow worse is not only the world's inevitable destiny but also humanity's only hope, since by this means alone

will Christ's return be made possible. Hence if Germany can give us a worse world than we now have—and who believes that her capacity for devising horrors is yet exhausted!—the premillennialist might well want Germany to win. A Teutonic victory ought to bring us nearer to the end of the present world.

The issue is a very practical one at present. If premillennialism is true, as its advocates so unhesitatingly affirm, why should the American people make sacrifices and the youth of the land risk life and limb in a cause that in the nature of the case is doomed to failure whichever way the victory turns? Such teaching may easily become, if in fact it has not already become, an effective instrument in the hands of propagandists who wish to undermine the nation's efficiency in the present crisis. He indeed would be a stupid enemy who did not readily perceive that to aid and abet the premillennial movement is one of the safest and most subtle forms of activity in which he can engage. Here he is doubly secure. To discover his real motive is extremely difficult, and when suspected he may take refuge behind America's inherent aversion for anything that smacks of religious persecution. And all the while he has at his disposal a mighty instrument for strangling the pious but unwary citizen's sense of duty toward democracy and humanity.

Extent of the Propaganda

There is something very suggestive about the extent and vigor of premillennial activities in recent times. If these activities were confined to a few ob-

scure sects the danger might be comparatively insignificant, but this virus has been injected into the spiritual veins of large numbers of people in various denominations. A prominent eastern minister in one of the larger Protestant bodies painfully confesses that his denomination is "cracked from sea to sea," some of its most influential pulpits even being occupied by men who are actively indoctrinating their audiences in this vicious teaching. Already the menace has assumed such proportions that Christian leaders among Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and similarly influential bodies are beginning to realize the necessity of actively opposing the pernicious propaganda.

The danger is not restricted to a single locality; it has become nationwide. In a recent publication a southern writer informs us that "this error of the premillennialists is doing a great deal to undermine the faith of our people and lead them away from the things that are worth while. . . . That some very distinguished men have taken up with this error makes it all the more dangerous to our people." From the Canadian Middle West comes the information that "the premillennial propaganda is exceedingly aggressive these days, and our people are not too well informed on the subject and so fail to realize the practical implications of this pessimistic philosophy of life which is especially to be deplored at the present time." Every preacher is admonished to equip himself at once to show "the folly and futility of that most helpless of all gospels, millenarianism, which thrives upon wars and rumors of wars and strikes at the very heart of all democratic ideals."

From north, south, east, and west come similar warnings of danger. One pastor informs us that in his part of the country distinct efforts have been made to establish in almost every church of the various denominations a premillennial control of the management, thus preventing the appointment of any ministers who were not of this stripe. With a thoroughness suspiciously Teutonic the premillennial movement in its present activities is everywhere making its influence felt, and felt in so subtle a way as to threaten our national enthusiasm at one of its most vulnerable points.

Disseminating Agencies

From distributing centers such as Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other vantage-points, the literature of premillenarianism is being spread broadcast over the country in order to win as many converts as possible to the premillennial view. Books, periodicals, pamphlets, and tracts in large quantities are being industriously circulated. Extensive use is made of advertising facilities in both the religious and the secular press. Frequent conferences are held, some on a smaller and some on a larger scale, as a means of creating interest and attracting attention. Special evangelistic campaigns are sometimes devoted very largely to this propaganda. In sending out what he terms "an S.O.S. call" for helps to put into the hands of his bewildered people, a New Hampshire pastor says that they have just passed through the nightmare of an evangelistic campaign of which about a dozen addresses were devoted to the advocacy of premillenarianism.

Almost every Sunday numerous well-meaning pastors are vigorously advocat-

ing this harmful delusion, doubtless not realizing the insidious character of their message. Not even the children of the Sunday school escape. The innocent youths upon whose loyalty and devotion to democracy the future welfare of our nation depends are often subjected to premillennial indoctrination by teachers addicted to the use of the well-known *Sunday School Times*, which has now become an open exponent of premillennialism. Nor are the soldiers always spared. Premillennial literature finds its way to the cantonments, and occasionally chaplains or Y.M.C.A. speakers strive to inject this enervating teaching into the blood of our fighting men.

Large amounts of money are being expended upon the propaganda. An estimate of the cost of advertising alone, to say nothing of the still greater expenses of issuing for free distribution books, tracts, and other literature, shows that the enterprise is being heavily financed. Premillennialists represent the suggestion that enemy gold is behind their activities, and one group of them has publicly affirmed that the federal authorities' inspection of their books failed to justify this suspicion. However that may be, we have in the premillennial propaganda as a whole an instance of serious economic waste by which large sums of money are being diverted from projects that might contribute directly toward the success of the war. On the other hand, this money is being employed to cultivate in the people a conviction that the war is futile and that it is not our task to seek to improve the present order of society. Essentially the same injury is done to our national cause, whether it is German gold that is being used to boost pre-

millenarianism or whether would-be loyal citizens by freely contributing of their own resources inadvertently play into the hands of the enemy.

What wonder that government workers speaking in certain communities on behalf of the recent Liberty Loan were accorded a cool reception! How could one expect enthusiastic support for a national enterprise from citizens whose sense of social responsibility had been lulled to sleep Sunday after Sunday by preachers proclaiming the nearness of Christ's return, the necessity of constant deterioration until the end comes, and the utter inability of human effort to establish permanently improved forms of government? Here is a sample situation:

I have been speaking for the third Liberty Loan two and three times each day for the past ten days and have not been in a single community that some evangelist, so called, has not been there recently preaching "the last days" idea. The presentation seems to me to be a great disaster to communities where people accept it. . . . This certainly has the effect of dividing sentiment, if not the turning of the many who accept it from the activity needed now in the prosecution of this war.

I.W.W. Affinities

The principles of premillennialism readily lend themselves to the purpose of the I.W.W. propaganda, with its radical hatred of all organized society and its vigorous anti-war polemic. When one regards the present world as irredeemably bad, it is only a short step to a typical I.W.W. tirade against existing institutions. And if the present war cannot possibly issue in an improved state of affairs, it is by no means inconsistent on the part of those who hold

this belief to use every means in their power in order to avoid personal participation in the conflict. Thus two fundamental premillenarian principles are pressed to their logical issue.

This result is exhibited in a letter received a few months ago. It angrily reviles the church and particularly those ministers who advocate loyal participation in the present war. They are denounced as menials of the rich and in league with the money magnates who are accused of precipitating and perpetuating the war for their own personal gain. A few words from this insane tirade will show its strong pre-millennial leanings:

Ye go out to all parts of this country and beg and command the people to go over across the seas to save your worthless hides for a little longer. Know you that neither army will ever return nor will any man of them leave the field of battle, for God will rise in his might and thunder from Sinai and send fire from heaven to consume them and their guns and their ammunition, their hospital corps and their trucks, so that where a battlefield now is will be but charred remains and volcanic ash. . . . We draw near to that time, yet you preach only slaughter and send more men to the battlefields where they can do no good.

Patriotic Camouflage

Among premillenarians the Russellites have perhaps been the most ready to press their principles to a logical issue. As a result they, along with their I.W.W. neighbors, have fallen under the ban of the authorities both in Canada and in the United States. Now they hasten to assure the world that they never had any thought of opposing the war, "for the reason that they recognize it of divine permission and could not oppose its progress without opposing the very

foundation of their belief." But this very confession brings its own condemnation. Of course the premillennialist does not oppose the war; what he opposes—always in principle and sometimes by overt act—is any hopeful effort to win this war and thereby so reconstitute international relationships that warfare may henceforth be eliminated as a factor in human experience. It is this negative attitude that constitutes his most serious crime against society and against the nation in its present hour of testing.

Government interference with the Russellites has had a disturbing effect in other premillennial camps and has called forth declarations of patriotism, even though there has been no abatement of effort to proclaim the early end of the world and its irredeemable wretchedness. But this pessimism tends to become more carefully camouflaged. An illustration in point is furnished by the recent call for a "Bible Conference on the return of our Lord." The announcements issued early in April made conspicuous the expressions "Return of our Lord" and "Second Coming." But in later circulars these phrases either dropped out of sight in the headlines or were given a less conspicuous place, while stress was placed upon the study of "prophecy." In the meantime the federal authorities were reported to have suppressed premillennial activities in Los Angeles, and caution doubtless seemed the better part of valor. A patriotic flavor was given the enterprise by placing the imprint of a Third Liberty Loan button upon the stationery and by circulating a leaflet containing President Wilson's advice to soldiers to read their Bibles.

However sincere may have been the motives prompting these patriotic decorations, the pessimistic emphasis of premillennialism has not been changed in the least. Whether boldly pushed to its logical issue, or quietly insinuated into the belief of the masses, all forms of premillenarianism are equally delusive in principle and similarly vicious in practice.

An Ancient Delusion

The belief in a catastrophic end of the present world is a very old and persistent delusion. Various ancient peoples imagined that the ills of life were too powerful to be conquered by a gradual process of human attainment, and so they predicted a cataclysmic end of present society to be followed by the sudden inauguration of an entirely new order. This type of thinking was especially popular within certain Palestinian Jewish circles, where it was offered as a means of escape from sufferings experienced during the first and second centuries B.C. and the first century A.D.

From Judaism this elusive hope passed over to Christianity, where it was linked with the expectation of an early return of Christ in visible form to rescue his disciples from their unhappy position in a hostile pagan world. Down through the Christian centuries first one and then another expectant premillennialist, vainly proclaiming the nearness of the end, was swept aside and forgotten as the stream of human history moved steadily onward in its uninterrupted course. From time to time striking events that seemed temporarily to presage the end always passed, leaving the hope of the second coming

unfulfilled and imposing upon man himself the duty of repairing the damaged world and devising ways to ward off similar disasters in the future.

Thus men have gradually learned that they must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. To the inner life of the spirit, and not to a cosmic cataclysm, they must look for the help of God who works through human agencies to make known and to accomplish his purposes in the world. An hour of agony such as that through which mankind is now passing becomes a new divine summons to the people of the twentieth century to contribute their part toward the establishment of a better world and the inauguration of a new day for humanity. Concretely our special task is that of defending the sacred rights of democracy and helping to make this ideal supreme in all international relationships.

An Enemy of Democracy

The premillennialist hears no imperious summons to this new task. But that is not all. He insists on being a missionary of pessimism, thereby dampening the enthusiasm of many whose assistance is mightily needed for the accomplishment of the gigantic task in hand. He still clings to the time-honored delusion of the nearness of the end, indulging himself in this antiquated luxury of the imagination, and vainly praying God to destroy the very world that the suppliant himself ought to be loyally struggling to reform. In assuming this attitude wittingly or unwittingly he becomes a pronounced enemy of democracy and a serious menace to the nation's morale in this hour of its need.